critical digest

VOL. V No. 10 November 17, 1952

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

National Theatre of Greece-Hellinger, 11/19/52. Guthrie McClintic by arrangement with ANTA presents Greek company headed by Katina Paxinou and Alexis Minots. Limited two week performance starts with Electra, staged by Dimitri Rondiris and music by Dimitri Mitropoulos. Translated into modern Greek by J. Griparis. Starting November 24th the company will present Oedipus Tyrannus, staged by Katina Paxinou, staged by Mr. Minotis, with music by Miss Paxinou, translated into modern Greek by Photos Politis...The Seven Year Itch-Fulton, 11/20/52. Courtney Burr and Elliott Nugent present a new romantic comedy by George Axelrod. Tom Ewell and Vanessa Brown featured, directed by John Gerstad.

Digests of Current Reviews - more back page

Madeleine Renaud-Jean Louis Barrault Company, Ziegfeld, 11/12/52. Personal triumph for French stars and their repertory company recorded by all daily reviewers. Baptiste in pantomime by Jacques Prevert, was favorite of opening program. Some thought Marivaux comedy Les Fausses Confidences was dated. McClain, Journal American; Coleman, Mirror; and Eaton, Press, were only critics who complained of language problems. First advised via headline "speakers of French will have a fine time." Coleman suggested dictionaries be brought, while Eaton doubts if anyone born outside of Paris could fully understand it. Closely knit ensemble acting by impeccable cast lauded by all. Kerr, Herald Tribune, advised everyone interested in acting, no matter the state of his French to see it. Chapman, News, enjoyed evening, but felt Barrault better than Renaud. Atkinson, Times, found it welcome, stimulating event for New York theatre, though he did think group's lighting and costumes could be better. Hawkins, World Telegram and Sun, noted troupe achieves blend in its ensemble acting.

Climate of Eden, Beck 11/6/52. Weekly reviewers were of a divided opinion on the merits of Moss Hart's adaptation of Edgar Mittelholzer's novel "Shadows Move Among Them." Cue and New Yorker reviewers praised it, while majority lightly panned it. Keating, Cue, found it a continuously interesting and charming play, directed and played with skill and feeling. Gibbs, New Yorker, nominated John Crowell's portrayal as one of the finest of the year. Rosemary Harris, Penelope Munday, Isabel Elsom were highly rated by most, while Lee Montague was considered miscast by several. Trade paper reviewers personally didn't like what they considered an unsatisfactory play, but both Hobe, Variety, and Francis, Billboard, admitted several of the charming scenes might be enough to carry evening for some fans. Francis couldn't believe the characters were real. Newsweek man also noted some fine, imaginative writing, but two plots failed to meet. Time critic blamed lack of sustained interest on basic fact that novel itself is more literal than dramatic. WCBS Leonard, who panned show, quipped that if this is the climate of Eden, no wonder the world is in such a state.

Shakespeare & Groucho

Couple who recently appeared on NBC TV "You Bet Your Life" quiz with Groucho Marx received a 3-2 decision and $1,000 for saying that "Pistol" and not "Falstaff" is the "cowardly braggart" who appears in Henry IV, Henry V and Merry Wives of Windsor, Time reports. Watts, Post, agreed on Pistol, while Atkinson, Times, would have answered Falstaff. Walter Hampden noted that he is an off stage character in one play, so couple should have received $500. Charles Laughton admits it is controversial point, but votes for Falstaff. Laurence Olivier reminded program that character appeared in Henry V film, not play.

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' Drama Desk Interviewed '

New York theatre reporters and editors were on the answer end of the interview when the American Theatre Wing Professional Training Program Symposium questioned them. "Drama Desk" members who participated included Rice, Post; Hawkins, WT&S; Pikodna, Herald Tribune; Colby, Journal of Commerce; Hewes, Saturday Review; Hassen, Show Business; and Kraus, Critical Digest.

Panel admitted there wasn't much a critic could do when theatre ads misquoted him. The critic has no legal redress because all of the words used in the misleading ad are actually in the review, Colby explained. Hawkins admitted that it is almost impossible to write a "con" verdict of a production that can't be used in a quote ad. New York Film Critics Circle planned action on this problem, Pikodna added, but couldn't arrive at a workable conclusion.

The work of the theatre press agent in aiding theatre reporters was praised by all. Anyone writing a column in such a large city as New York couldn't operate without them, Rice lauded. Hassen advised caution in accepting press agents material, picking only items from people you know to be reliable.

Slight difference of opinion developed over the very leading question "Who reads the drama pages." Colby believes that pretty nearly everyone is interested in the glamor of the theatre, whether they realize it or not. Hawkins condemned printing of trade paper items, such as lists of backers, in the daily drama pages. Such items are not of interest to anyone, he stated. Rice thinks readers of theatre news are greatly interested in the theatre. He doubts very much if the "anniversary playgoer" bothers to keep up to date on drama news. Members of the audience, students of the theatre, said that they read almost all of the drama pages daily.

' Off Broadway Notes '

Gordon Reilly, a tragedy by Charles Best, opens November 25th at Originals Only, directed by Tom Hill...Light Opera Theatre opens 17th season at Provincetown presenting Gilbert & Sullivan and Offenback during November and December...Equity Library Theatre presents The Glass Menagerie November 19-23, and As You Like It December 3-7...Lighthouse Players opens 30th season with Mrs. Moonlight, Benn W. Levy's play, on November 20th. Five of the cast of eight are blind performers...Tophatters open their 100th show November 21st in Brooklyn with Mother Is A Freshman...Harvard's 105th Hasty Pudding production Strike While It's Hot will play at Barbizon Plaza December 27th...Alfred Drake reached "tentative" agreement to stage William de Lys' Sodom Tennessee.

' Vaudeville '

Maxie Rosenbloom heads current Palace vaudeville. Also featured are Tip, Tap, Toe; Les Chambertys, Vic Spaddy, Gloria Villar, and McFarland and Brown...Ethel Waters and Dizzy Gillespie appear at Apollo this week...Paramount stage show includes The Four Aces, Sunny Galy, Jay Lawrence and Charlie Barnet and his orchestra...New Radio City stage show, playing with "Plymouth Adventure" features "Star Spangled" revue staged by Leonidoff...Solid entertainment is how Smith, Billboard, rates current Roxy stage show, though he doubts if it will pull much business. Blackburn Twins with new partner Marion Colby got top praise, while critic was disappointed that Frances Langford was suffering from a bad cold.

' Green Room Department '

BRITISH EQUITY WARNED...English actors union which voted itself into a deadlock on whether Jose Ferrer should be allowed to act in Old Vic's London production of The Seagulls warned by Hawkins, WT&S, and Sheaffer, Eagle, that English actors in NYC are not only welcomed, but could easily be replaced. Former noted, for instance, that Kevin McCarthy could do as fine a job as James Hanley in The Millionairess.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Delayed review on Top Banana filed by Phillips, WT&S, who now doesn't mind saying that he considered musical dullest in ten years...Morehouse, WT&S, would like to see Lou Holtz back at the Palace and Clarence Derwent try the role of Shylock...Broadway at present has more "hits" than any time in the history of Broadway, states NBC Critic at Large Pearson.

FRENCH WELCOMED...Month long stay of Jean Louis Barrault and Madeleine Renauld repertory company is a prime example of kind of cultural exchanges which enable people to understand and respect one another's achievements, points out Herald Tribune editorial...Burr, Playbill, greets group as working example of successful repertory company. Such companies add to stature of entire theatre industry.

COLUMN TIPS...Charles Laughton ordered to retire by his doctors, hears Winchell...Broadway juvenile on verge of endangering his career by placing himself in middle of the hottest Broadway feud of all time, warns Kilgallen...Ziegfeld Theatre not for sale, reports Walker...B.S.Pulley, Guys and Dolls' gravel voiced actor, nominated by Sobol to play Tristan to Marilyn Monroe's Isolde.

JR.MAIL BOX...Sixteen year old theatre fan asked Sylvester, News, if it is true that most critics are either tired or drunk when they write their reviews. News drama editor answered that fact is "tired and drunk."...High school student firmly believes that critics shouldn't be allowed to review anything they couldn't do themselves. Skolsky, Post, predicts young actress will adore critics when and if they adore her.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES...Broadway managers must have independent incomes, My Darlin' Aida producer Robert Joseph told Coleman, Mirror. By having money to spend on production in off season he was able to save backers 40 percent...Author-Director of same musical, Charles Friedman, told Sylvester, News, that show may be first to be done by "Cinerama" and that he would like to try an outdoor production of same show in the future.

' Theatre News Round Up '

Shows that closed include In Any Language...The Fourposter moves to Golden on December 1st...21st anniversary of Theatre Collection of NY Public Library observed by Citizens Advisory Committee dinner opening 1952-1953 fund-raising campaign...Bernardine joins shows opening Mondays at 7:00 PM...Colby, Journal of Commerce, now heard on "Broadway Matinee" TV show daily at 12:30 PM, EST, over WABD and DuMont network...L.L. Stevenson, NANA Broadway columnist, retiring...American Theatre Wing collecting items for "Thrift Drive"...A town in Idaho may be named "Sneaky Falls" after town of same name in Bernardine...Angus Duncan appointed executive secretary of Actors' Equity..."We like Ike" song in Call Me Madam withdrawn day after national elections, show is now in Detroit. Personal effects of Jane Cowl who died in June 1950 will be sold at auction in warehouse of the Public Administrator, NYC, on November 18th...Carlton House restaurant has display of current "Playbills."...T.J.Halligan, Pal Joey, doubles into Jimmy Ryan's Blue Note supper club...New Haven RR January Show Train on January 16th for Wish You Were Here.

' Out of Town Tryouts '

Time Out for Ginger, Ronald Alexander's new comedy presented by Shepard Traube and Gordon Pollock which debuted in Wilmington, is a pleasant comedy that builds slowly through several hilarious scenes to gay but lump in the threat finish, concludes Klep, Variety. Author reveals flare for sparkling dialogue, cast headed by Melvyn Douglas is fine...Rise by Sin, new drama by Scott Michel presented by Trudi Michel and Herbert Berger which opened in New Haven, rated as an extended, though sometimes interesting, one acter rather than a full length play, by Bone, Variety. Cast is good, story is interesting, much of dialogue moves with jet speed.

' Digests of Current Reviews '

The Deep Blue Sea-Morosco, 11/5/52. Newsweek aisle sitter sole weekly critic to okay Terence Rattigan's new play, starring Margaret Sullavan and presented by Alfred de Liagre, Jr. and John C. Wilson. Critic agreed with colleagues who filed it under "Woman's play," but he thought star's personal attractiveness and professional skill more than enough to electrify an otherwise slick and static play. Reviewer also joined in majority's opinion that star's attractive looks made her role unconvincing. Trade paper reviewers admitted show will be hit, but it wasn't for them. Keating, Cue, doubts if cast is admirably suited. Gibbs, New Yorker, noted Sullavan dealt admirably with rubbish at hand which every now and then she was able to make almost plausible. Using the title to express their feelings, Time man is sure deep blue sea never gave off a fishier smell, while WEVD Shipley found sea really a shallow pond.

My[redacted]lin' Aida-Winter Garden, 10/27/52. Add two more diverse verdicts on Robert Joseph'[redacted]ion of Charles Friedman's adaptation of Verdi opera. Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, had several minor complaints, but his overall feeling was that despite its occasional heavy handedness it was a theatre evening of distinction and importance. Switching of scene from Egypt to Tennessee didn't achieve the desired effect he noted. George Jean Nathan panned most elements of the huge production. Reading that it cost $300,000 plus, critic advised that $100,000 should have been put aside to get Oscar Hammerstein II to do book and lyrics. Twenty-five thousand should have been spent on a larger orchestra and another $10,000 for more expert arrangements of the music. Fifteen dollars more should have been spent for a fortune teller to point out that you cannot get anywhere in romantic musical drama unless you hire romantic actors to play and sing in it.

An Evening with Beatrice Lillie-Booth, 10/2/52. Marshall, Nation, joins in 100 percent critical raves for Edward Duryea Dowling presentation of Lillie and Reginald Gardner. Lillie has all the essential and formal requisites of her calling, critic noted, including skill, experience, sophistication, sense of time. Yet she uses them in such a way as to create the effect of spontaneous, artless, improvised fooling meant only for friends and relatives.

' Legit Stuff '

Sammy Schwartz subbing for Sam Levene, Guys and Dolls, later out due to virus infection...Rise by Sin folded in Washington...Marian Burke subbing for Isabel Bigley, Guys and Dolls, during latter's two week vacation...Charges that Shuberts were allegedly intimidating managers to route shows into Washington Shubert theatre being studied by Committee of Theatrical Producers...ANTA membership will vote on ratification of enlarged board of directors, with nationwide representation, December 15th.